



undp

CHOICES



THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT MAGAZINE

The Long Haul

Special Issue for the Fourth World Conference on Women



AUGUST 1995



In my foreword to this year's *Human Development Report*, I said that history is likely to judge progress in the 21st century by the equality of opportunity among people and nations. And that the most persistent inequality has been in relations between the sexes.

As a contribution to the Fourth World Conference on Women, the *Human Development Report* quantifies the global gender gap, and provides several "yardsticks" by which countries can assess where they are and where they need to go in order to give women their fair share. This special issue of CHOICES takes a more personal look at what's behind the statistics — at the individual struggles of women, and of the families and communities of which they are part. The issue concludes with an article by one of our male contributors, who reminds us that the advancement of women is difficult — perhaps impossible — without the active support of men.

The Fourth World Conference on Women is exciting for many reasons, not least of which is the promise it holds for real changes in all of our lives. Successive crises — be they ethnic conflicts, environmental disasters or the unrelenting breakdown of societies — remind us of how urgent and profound are the changes that are needed. More and more people are suggesting that it is women who will provide the key to more humane and harmonious relations in our troubled world. But in order for that to happen, women must have access to the doors of economic and political power.

I am confident that the Beijing Women's Conference will not only consolidate the gains made for women in the series of world conferences that have followed the Rio Earth Summit, but will

bring home the fact that gender considerations must be an integral part of any development effort. UNDP will continue to contribute to the ongoing policy dialogue on ways in which to bring this about. And we stand ready to assist countries in carrying out a response to the Beijing Platform for Action, through our network of country offices and Resident Coordinator system. As far as our own programme is concerned, gender equity and the advancement of women has been adopted as one of UNDP's four thematic goals.

The cover of this special issue of CHOICES is not celebratory of women. Rather, it is a reminder of the opportunities lost to women, and the long road we have yet to travel in achieving more egalitarian societies — and a more balanced planet.

James Gustave Speth
Administrator

United Nations Development Programme

CHOICES

THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT MAGAZINE

VOL. 4, No. 2



PROFILE

Mrs. M's Road to Beijing Perdita Huston 4

VIEWPOINTS

The Invisible Girl Neera Sohoni, with viewpoints from
Amalia Luis Yach, Yuki Kai and Eleanor N. Wozei 7
Women and the HIV Epidemic: No Individual Solutions Elizabeth Reid 30
Let's Not Forget About the Men Nick Danforth 33



Page 18

FEATURES

Sudan: Voices in the Desert Ruth Massey 11
Sri Lanka: Spinning New Opportunities From Silk David Beatty 14
The Women Water Masters of Haiti David Hecht 24
For Palestinian Women, the Struggle Goes On Elizabeth Coleman 26

ISSUE

Wise Women of the Rainforest Mary Jo McConahay 18



Page 26

Director: Dybrell Dhallo *Editor:* Lous Jensen *Contributing Editors:* Mary Lynn Hanley, Peter Gall
Editorial Assistant: Françoise Gerber *Art Director:* Maureen Lynch *Design:* Yuh-Chi Wang, Mary Vengrofski
Production: Mila Feliciano, Jennifer Prince *Translations Manager:* Elizabeth Scott Andrews
Administration: Linda Inocencio-Groves, Freweini Abebe, Danielle Strahl *Circulation:* Alison Walton, Laleh Ebrahimian
Distribution: Alula Chelle, Paul Adams *Printed by:* Phoenix-Trykkeriet AS, Denmark
Published by: Division of Public Affairs, United Nations Development Programme,
One United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017, Tel: (212) 906-5315, Fax: (212) 906-5364

The articles in this magazine do not necessarily reflect the official views or policies of the United Nations Development Programme, nor do the boundaries and names shown on maps imply official endorsement by the United Nations. Articles and photos may be freely reproduced so long as credit is given and tear sheets are provided to the editors. CHOICES is published three times a year in English, French, Japanese and Spanish.

Cover photo of women in Bale, Ethiopia by John Isaac.

Printed on chlorine-free recycled paper with vegetable inks and produced by means of environmentally compatible technology.



Mrs. M's Road to Beijing

Unorthodox management style and all, Gertrude Mongella brings a unique personal vision to the direction of the Fourth World Conference on Women.

By Perdita Huston

United Nations, New York — "Women no longer imitate the ways of men. They have their own style, and it's definitely different." The Honorable Gertrude Mongella, known as "Mrs. M" at the secretariat of the Fourth World Conference on Women, which she directs, is a no frills, no nonsense woman of unique style; her comment on the changing attitudes of women fits her like a glove.

Stateswoman, teacher, wife and mother, Mrs. M will guide the global conference to be held in Beijing, China, on 4-15 September, as secretary-general. The gathering is the culmination of two decades of effort to educate the world community on the position of women in society and the conditions under which they live. For the great majority of women and girls, inequities in education, access to health care, financial resources, technologies, training, political and economic decision-making and personal security are common facts of life at the close of the 20th century. The conference platform, known as the Agenda for Equality, calls for an end to the discrimination against women and girls that pervades virtually every society. Charged with guiding governments to take concrete actions to erase these inequities, Gertrude Mongella says that it will require nothing less than "the transformation of society as we know it."

Who is this woman who dared take on such a formidable assignment? What in the background of Gertrude

Mongella prepares her for the simultaneous leadership of the Commission on the Status of Women, the Division for the Advancement of Women, the direction of the Commission on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Beijing Conference?

Better still, why is one person charged with so many responsibilities when organizing a conference on the future of half of humanity?

Secretary-General Mongella shrugs off the question, saying, "It's part of being a woman." Indeed Mongella is no stranger to multiple roles. She circulates in the halls of UN headquarters in New York without pretention or fanfare, far more experienced than most who pass by. A bride at 22, a minister of state at 30, wife of the recently retired archivist of Tanzania and mother of four, she has been a development practitioner, parliamentarian, cabinet minister and Tanzania's high commissioner to India. Her original profession, schoolteaching, resurfaces from time to time and reminds one of affable teachers long forgotten.

The second of four children of a carpenter-mason who was a district-level leader in the Tanzanian independence movement, Mongella believes her father's political activism may have cost him his job. But it demonstrated standards of loyalty-to-principle to his children. "I learned early that the power to make your own decisions and stand by them is what counts ... not trying to please everybody," she says.

Mrs. M's straightforward approach and lack of practice in UN bureaucratic drills have led some to believe that she is at a disadvantage in guiding the preparation for Beijing. Her consensus management style and lack of guile are a drawback, they insist. Others believe these factors are her greatest strength, that her critics are in danger of underestimating Mrs. M, the politician.

Noeleen Heyzer, director of the UN Development Fund for Women, is another recent arrival in the UN hierarchy. She understands Mrs. M's predicament, saying, "Most people coming into the system are expected to find their own way around. Everyone is so busy, you have to create your own survival group."

As her own adviser, unencumbered by bureaucratic debts, Gertrude Mongella juggles the multiple demands of groups seeking changes in the conference platform, the needs of the host country and non-governmental organizations and the prerogatives of UN conference rules. It's not an easy task.

The Agenda for Equality is the result of recommendations made by regional preparatory meetings held during the past year. The Commission on the Status of Women requested specifically that the document be clear, concise and easy to understand. "I sought to prepare a document that women and men everywhere could understand and relate to," Mongella explains. "It's a text which places women at the centre, as key actors, in finding solutions to the problems of increasing poverty, diminishing resources, environmental degradation and demographic trends. The world conferences held in the past decade have fully recognized the pivotal role of women in ad-

ressing major global issues. Now it's time to act upon that consensus."

Unfortunately there are those who wish to weaken that effort. Very early in the March preparatory committee meetings, it became evident that an effort to undermine the gains made by women

last September at the International Conference on Population and Development would be a serious challenge to the success of the Beijing conference. The platform text doubled in length and many of its recommendations, even words such as gender, have been questioned, de-

bated and ultimately bracketed, noting a lack of consensus. A struggle for women's reproductive rights looms and, as it did at the Cairo conference, may prove to be a lengthy, divisive debate that diverts attention from the wide-ranging recommendations for women's equality.

"Equal access to education, training and adequate health care, the human rights abuses of all types of violence and the deplorable image of women projected by most media are barriers to women's advancement and must be addressed...." Mongella turns pensive when she speaks of the increasing number of women living in poverty and the need for the Beijing conference to place particular emphasis on reversing that trend.

Mrs. M is, after all, a woman who knows of what she speaks. When she visits her parents' home on Lake Victoria in Tanzania, she comes face to face with her origins and the daily tasks of the majority of women in today's world. Her parents' home has no running water and the secretary-general of the Fourth World Conference on Women performs duties learned years ago, one of which is fetching water for family use. Recounting the story, Gertrude Mongella smiles wryly, saying, "Fetching water one day, staying in a fancy Hilton the next..."

"My story is one of child survival. Given where I was born 50 years ago, the chances of my living past the first or second year were minimal. On Ukerewe Island in Lake Victoria, food was abun-



Stephanie Hollyman / UNDP

When she visits her parents' home on Lake Victoria in Tanzania, she comes face to face with her origins and the daily tasks of the majority of women in today's world.

The Powerful Idea of Equality

In the summer of 1976, just after the commemoration of International Women's Year, I was interviewing rural women on the factors of change in their lives and communities. One morning outside a rural health centre in central Tunisia, I sat talking with a group of them when a nomadic woman who had been gathering chaff in a nearby field approached me. Rather brazenly she asked, "Why are you talking to all those women and not to me?"

Surprised, and curious about the audacity of her approach, I invited her to sit with me so we could talk. Obviously pleased, she willingly told of her family's situation as hired herders who must move from south to north and back again in search of seasonal pasturage. "Are you able to send your children to school when you move around so much?" I asked. The woman proudly answered yes. I queried again, "Do you send all your children to school, both girls and boys?" She looked at me as if I'd lost my senses. "Of course!" she replied. "Why, of course?" I insisted.

Again incredulous, she considered my question. Her gaze told me I was seriously uninformed, if not ignorant. Then, as if speaking to a child, she said, "The whole world had a Year for Women. So women are important now. Of course I send my daughters to school!" — P.H.

dant but health facilities were scarce and life harsh. Then, too, being a girl was not necessarily an advantage. We were one son and three daughters. My father insisted on sending us all to school. He was criticized by his brother who said that we girls would become wayward if educated. My father replied, 'God gave me four children and I'm going to educate them to the best of my ability. What they do with it is their choice.'

"The education of girls is so important. My father made all the difference in my life. You see, if women can't make decisions in their personal lives, how can you expect them to make decisions in parliament or government?"

Mongella constantly reminds those she meets that little was known of the status of women in 1975, the year called International Women's Year. Statistics were not broken down by gender. There was little understanding of the depth of discrimination against female children, the opportunities denied to them but not their brothers. Two decades of research have exposed the barriers to women's equality and documented the contribution women make to development, to the sustainability of natural systems and, recently, to the capacity of the world economy to adjust to structural adjustment programmes. At the population conference in Cairo, governments recognized that women had been ignored as agents of development for too long and that men had been left out of family planning strategies. "We can't go our separate ways," Mongella insists. "Women and men, together, equal partners, equal beneficiaries..."

"Equality, Development and Peace" has been the slogan of the global women's agenda since 1975. The UN General Assembly recently adopted an Agenda for Peace and an Agenda for Development has also been proposed. One might assume that the women's agenda is two-thirds complete. That's far from being the case. Until the third component — equality between men and

women in access to resources and decision-making — is integral to the other initiatives, nothing will be achieved.

With the exception of the HIV pandemic and the effects of structural adjustment on women and children, most Agenda for Equality items are those that governments have debated for the past two decades. "What has changed along the way," explains Mongella, "is the awareness and thus, attitudes. In Beijing we have to go the next step: We have to get governments' commitment to action. Commitments to funding and follow-through. As for the UN itself, it has no excuse not to act. Countries sometimes claim they have cultural practices, traditions or taboos that prevent fast action, but what are the taboos in the UN that have kept women down?"

When asked specifically how women have fared in the United Nations system, Gertrude Mongella had several observations. "The working environment is not conducive to women's lives or to family life. We have a long way to go. The men in the UN don't have time to be fathers. It's still a typical situation which ignores people's personal lives and roles."

She laughs again and adds, "Do we ever ask men the question, 'How do you balance work with family life?'" The secretary-general shakes her head in mock surprise and asks rhetorically, "How long are the women of the world going to be silent?"

"Women aren't asking the world to carry them on their backs — only that the doors are opened to them." ■

Perdita Huston is the author of Third World Women Speak Out, Motherhood by Choice and Message from the Village. Her work has appeared in dozens of publications, including the New York Times Magazine and the International Herald Tribune.

My first experience of being devalued as a girl came when I was 11 and my brother had just been born. Our family cook in India who had cared for me all my life broke the news gleefully: "We have what we wanted – a son and heir. You poor loser!"

Today, as the mother of three daughters, my preoccupation with the global status of girls is not accidental. For I believe it is the girl who conditions and shapes the woman. And although feminists and development planners may be aware of that connection, they have not honoured it sufficiently. The girl is as invisible in the development discourse of today as the woman was prior to the feminist movement of the 1960s.

Yet it is girls – not women – who suffer most from inequitable development because they must deal with the double bind of age and gender discrimination. Nor is this process confined to the developing world. Even where poverty and survival are not overriding concerns, the gender factor inhibits equal opportunities and aspirations for girls.

Whether in rich or poor countries, the developed or the developing world, the prevalence of patriarchal values ensures that from the moment of a female's birth, even conception, she is viewed as the lesser child. Beginning with the family, extending to the school and the workplace, and reinforced by law, religion, tradition, the media and politics, she is trained to be "feminine" – meaning domestic and docile – and to regard becoming a wife and mother as her life's ultimate ambitions. By retaining a lock on her aspirations, such gender-biased parenting not only reduces her life prospects but robs the society through underutilized or unutilized female capital.

Given the privileged status males occupy over females, it's not surprising that in most of the world, parents want sons more than daughters. Even in cultures where there is no special preference for sons there is no active preference for daughters.

In traditional cultures, parents follow strict nutritional and intercourse guidelines believed to facilitate the conception of



The Invisible Girl

a male child. But even in developed countries, anecdotal and other evidence points to the widespread use of baking powder, epsom salt, and vinegar douches as well as certain coital positions to enhance the probability of a male fetus. In recent decades, technology has made it possible to use genetic planning and sex screening to prevent the female from ever being conceived, much less from being born.

Data from an Indian hospital documented by Ramanamma and Bambawale show that of a sample of 700 women, only four per cent of those expecting daughters chose to carry their pregnancies to term. The remaining 96 per cent had abortions. By contrast, 100 per cent of those expecting sons carried their pregnancies to term, even when a genetic disorder was considered likely.

Similarly in the United States, studies reveal a preference for male babies over female babies, especially when the baby is the first or only child. Asked how many children he had fathered, former American boxing champion Muhammad Ali answered unabashedly, "One boy and seven mistakes." Male preference also biases the grieving process. An American study of 236 parents who had experienced the death of a child concluded that parental grief was greater for the male than the female child.

For centuries, popular sayings and practices around the world have echoed this gender bias. In ancient Greece and Rome, mothers were advised to "expose" the female infant – to let her die. Siring a female child was a shameful act for which Hassidic Jews occasionally flogged a father. In Britain, the birth of a prince earned a 21 gun salute, a princess only 10. A Dutch proverb declares that "A house full of daughters is like a cellar full of sour beer." In China daughters are referred to as "maggots in the rice"; among the Zulus in South Africa, as "merely weeds."

*Indian researcher Neera Sohoni
argues that development efforts
often overlook the situation of girls,
which in turn limits
the empowerment of women.*

A girl's inferior status is rooted not just in her sexuality but in her capacity to bear children and the implied threat to her virginity. Ironically, for all its indispensable social value, the reproductive capacity of the female does little to enhance a girl's status or worth either in the family or the society. If anything, it only places further constraints on her in terms of food taboos and other more repressive practices such as foot-binding, purdah (enforced seclusion), early marriage, and genital mutilation, all of which are aimed at controlling her mobility and sexuality.

Food distribution in the average household of a developing country is frequently skewed in favour of the male — both the adult and the child — because it is the male who is viewed as the earner or potential earner in the family. Likewise in the developed countries, the "burnt chop" winds up on the female's plate rather than the male's. And in the latter countries it is girls who suffer the highest incidence of self-inflicted eating disorders such as anorexia, which are closely linked to low self-esteem and imaging pressures.

Once outside the home, girls invariably occupy a lower status than boys in school despite rigorous efforts by governments to enforce gender-neutral access goals. According to the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization some 60 million girls in the world have no access to primary schooling, compared to 40 million boys. Fewer girls enrol in school and far more drop out than boys. Even in American schools, girls do not receive the same quality or even quantity of education as their male peers, according to the American Association of University Women.

Meanwhile, time use studies in Africa and Asia but also in Australia, Canada and Italy show that the female child bears a heavier burden of unremunerated or low-paid household or extra-household work than her male counterpart. In the United States, parents are more apt to pay sons for housework than daughters. The message boys receive is that they should work "for pay" while girls should work "out of love." While girls may feel their contributions are unrecognized and largely unrewarded, boys learn early the value of their labour and the importance of linking work to wages. What today's girls learn from a sexist upbringing ultimately affects tomorrow's woman and tomorrow's mother. How can the chain be broken? The first step is to view not just adulthood but childhood through the prism of gender. This means subjecting all planning, programming and evaluation of development activities geared to children to a gender analysis and fostering vigorous compensatory programmes to remedy the effect of earlier male-biased approaches. Most important, however, it means acknowledging the girl's basic human right to a gender-just childhood and identifying and condemning those factors that discriminate against girls in the rearing process.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is the first global document that acknowledges the need for a gender-just childhood. Adopted in 1989 and ratified by 150 countries, it is a veritable Magna Carta for children that specifies the rights to survival, protection and development of every child, regardless of sex. Its single weakness is that it fails to identify let alone criticize sexist parenting as a crime against children.

The Human Rights Declaration prepared by the Human Rights Conference in Geneva in 1993 goes a step further by singling out the human rights of the girl child along with those of women as an "inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights." But here too, the document affords little protection to the girl when it comes to asserting her rights within the sanctity of the family. While she can take a school or an employer to court for creating a discriminatory environment, she has no such legal recourse against her parents.

Although it is far safer to challenge gender bias in the budgetary allocations of government-run health and education programmes, this approach will rarely go beyond producing cosmetic changes in the lifestyle and entitlement of girls. What will really count is challenging the patriarchal values embedded in the religious, cultural and socio-economic forces that shape people's private lives.

This is the real dilemma before any United Nations sponsored effort to ensure a gender-just childhood. Should the explosive issue arise at the Beijing Conference, it is bound to provoke charges of cultural or ideological imperialism. Yet, the world can no longer shirk the responsibility of effectively mediating between the contesting claims of national, cultural or the family's autonomy, and the human rights of girls. Only by a collective, concerted and sustained effort aimed at radically overhauling patriarchal values will girls be able to realize a truly gender-just childhood.

Until recently, feminists and development planners have suffered from a false complacency that the gains made by women will automatically trickle down to girls. In fact, this trickle-down theory has proven to be as ineffectual in women's development as it has proven in economic development. Whether in the developing or the developed world, where women enjoy high status, girls do not automatically share that experience. On the other hand, strategies for empowering girls are the beginning of women's empowerment.

Neera Sohoni is an affiliated scholar at Stanford University's Institute for Research on Women and Gender and a contributing editor of Pacific News Service. Her first book, The Burden of Girlhood: A Global Perspective, (Third Party, Inc., Oakland, California) was just released.

A Mayan View

Alotenango, Guatemala — I was born here in this town at the foot of the volcano called Fuego, or Fire. A little more than half of us who live here still wear *traje*, Maya Indian dress. People who don't dress this way have called me "indio," a slang word, because they think they are better than indigenous people. But it doesn't matter: I feel good inside, so they can't offend me.

My grandmother Romana is very old and still speaks *lengua* (Maya Ceqchiquel), but I don't speak much of it — just Spanish. I think my life today must be better than her's was. Before, she said they were always hungry — they worked only for others, not on their own land, and there was never enough corn. The men they worked for cheated them and they could do nothing about it. But I worked for two and a half years

"I think life is harder for young men these days than it is for us young women."

in a factory sewing clothes. There were 900 of us working there — it is owned by a Korean man. I earned US\$70 every 15 days. I got the job because I went to school until fifth grade, so I know how to write, and could fill out the application test. If one doesn't know how to write, you can't work. Now I have my own sewing machine — well, I have two payments

left, then it is all mine. I quit the factory because my family needed me more at home.

If I could have only one dream, it would be to sew — in my own little business. I could make three dresses a day, charging \$3 each, except that these days I have to help my father in the fields and my mother too. For me, what is important in life is to be able to work. My dream would also be to have my own house — a little better than the one I live in, which is just sticks and a dirt floor. I would like one made with a few cinder blocks. But not far from my parents. And I want only two or three children, not 10 like my mother has, because I think one is happier that way, and can tend the children better, too. I don't know what I'll do if my boyfriend says he wants more than that. We haven't talked about it yet.

I think life is harder for young men like him these days than it is for us young women. Besides being in the sun all day in the fields, they have to worry about being kidnapped by the guerrillas to fight with them, or forcibly recruited by the army. We are not yet at peace. Things are changing in this town around me. Before, when I was a child, everyone was more or less the same. But now, many are wearing *ladino* (non-indigenous) clothes and new religions are here. But that doesn't matter so much. We are still not so much different from each other. What is important is a clean heart.

— Amalia Luis Yach is an 18-year-old Mayan Indian

A Japanese View

"Despite the appearance that women are gaining more options, our basic status remains unchanged."

Tokyo — Are Japanese women free from the arranged marriage (*omiai*) system of the old days? Superficially yes, but in reality no. Nothing has changed from my standpoint as a young Japanese woman, except for the partner. Today, the "husband" is the company — one's employer and surrogate spouse.

In an "omiai" relationship, the bride was expected to bring youth, a good background and loyalty to her future husband and his family. Exactly the same demands are required by the company. New high school graduates are preferred over job-hoppers because they can adapt more readily to the customs of the company. Graduates of elite universities are valuable for they enhance the corporate image. In both cases, the female employees are required to remain as chaste wives.

As in an old-style marriage, the right of divorce is one-sided. Women can lose their jobs for any reason, for instance, because they decide to get married to a real husband instead of the company. More often than not, they are "retired" once they are no longer young. When employed at a travel agency as a tour operator, I once asked a boss how things worked in the company. "It's none of your business," he answered. "This is a male employee's concern. Just con-

Growing up female:

concentrate on your work without thinking so much."

Despite the appearance that women are gaining more options, our basic status remains unchanged. This is because Japanese society still clings to traditional conventions in which women are supposed to stay inside the home. Furthermore, young women are expected to maintain harmony among their group — at home or in the office — by suppressing their individual personalities.

In my grandmother's youth, such conformism was necessary to support the government. After World War II, the government was replaced by the company. To avoid the fate of an OL (office lady), many women feel they have no choice but to try to find a real partner — a high-salaried, well-educated man. In this way, they are just like their grandmothers.

On the other hand, there are many ambitious women who have a mind to carve out a career for themselves. A friend, who is 29, began to study information processing after working as a clerk for seven years. When she applied for an opening in another company, she was rejected because of her "advanced" age. She hasn't given up and says she's not afraid for her future. Such independence can lead to a life with real meaning. So why don't more of us try it? If we want to change our situation as women, we have to change ourselves. Waiting until society decides to move is not only a waste of time, it's a waste of one's life.

— Yuki Kai, 22, is a self-employed English-language teacher in Tokyo

Kampala — If I had to live my life over again, I'd still choose to be female. God had reason to make me female and it is definitely exciting. A female learns early in life that her inner strength can move mountains.

In many cultures, females are considered to be the "weaker" — or to put it more politely, "fairer" — sex. As a result, a girl grows up conscious that there are things women don't do. In my opinion, this psychological conditioning is damaging to the female psyche. When my mother was growing up, most women strove to become

"A female learns early in life that her inner strength can move mountains."

teachers or nurses or secretaries. A female's traditional role as home-maker was extended to include society at large. The exciting thing about that time was that our mothers were usually pioneers in venturing outside the home.

I believe that having mothers who are career women has widened our options and enabled us to consider non-traditional careers as our goals. I was fortunate to attend all-girl schools at critical stages in my life. I learned that my successes and failures were generally my own, and that there was no excuse not to do my best. The motto of my high school was "never give up" and our headmistress never missed an opportunity to remind us of it. At school it was an everyday occurrence to see girls excel-

ling in the traditionally male fields of math and science. Indeed, it was only during the holidays that we discovered that this was anything unusual. During the holidays most Ugandan girls become involved in domestic activities. Because of this, females must learn early to prioritize activities and make intensive use of the limited time they have.

All said and done, females still have traditions and customs to contend with. It is a pity that many males, and some females, underrate female capability. I have witnessed this in some offices where visitors, on being told the female behind the desk is in charge, insist on seeing "the boss." One of the most ironic advantages of being female is that males tend to underestimate their female competition.

Uganda has, since the late 1980s, advanced the policy of affirmative action for females. Although I support the idea of "positive discrimination," I believe it should be placed in a time frame. Otherwise it may defeat its objectives. Already, many men appreciate the complementary role of females in Ugandan society. This is a big step forward; but some men are already complaining that women are getting too many "advantages." There is hope that in the foreseeable future, women will have equal opportunity for equal ability not only on paper but in reality as well. ■

— Eleanor N. Wozel is a 24-year-old civil engineering graduate who teaches public health and environmental engineering at Makerere University

Amalia Luis Yach, Yuki Kai and Eleanor N. Wozel are contributors to YO! (Youth Outlook), published by Pacific News Service.



Through a development effort
that begins with villagers themselves,
women in northern Sudan
are speaking up and being heard.

SUDAN: **Voices in the Desert**

Text and photographs
by Ruth Massey

Lower Atbara — Standing in her bare courtyard with its cleanly swept earth floor, Islam Bakheit scatters a handful of grain among a dozen pure white hens. This morning is special because it is the first time the chickens have laid eggs in the seven months since their arrival. For this Sudanese woman, it is a portent of better things to come.

Islam, 22, lives with her husband and two children in Goz el Halag, a village in northeast Sudan. Her house is small and built of sun-dried bricks plastered over with sand from the vast desert beyond the village and silt from the nearby Atbara River. The hens were bought on credit as part of a rural development programme guided by the principle of ownership and decision-making by villagers themselves. The involvement of

women, who constitute 70 per cent of the rural workforce, is key.

In the Sudan, as elsewhere in Africa, women undertake almost every task connected to the growing and processing of food. Women also collect the family's fuel and water supply, gathering sticks and carrying heavy pots to and from the river. Life is not easy, even in the best of times. But since the 1980s, when the region was hit with a series of droughts and famines devastating in their scale and severity, life has been even harder. And in spite of their labour, women here have rarely received loans or other forms of assistance.

A programme called the Area Development Schemes (ADS) is working to change that by helping small independent farmers and artisans, including

women, to improve production and raise their incomes. The six-year, US\$28 million programme is funded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and is reaching half a million people in five of the poorest areas of northern Sudan. Unlike "top-down" approaches that failed to reach villages during the difficult years of drought, communities themselves are deciding what projects they need. They receive training and support to carry out the work through revolving credit funds, or *sandouqs*. Five years into the programme, loan repayment rates are an impressive 90 per cent.

"I have twelve chickens," says Islam, picking up one of them by its wing. "I borrowed 24,000 pounds (\$50) from the *sandouq* to buy them. When they start laying more eggs I'll sell them on the market and pay back my loan. And then I'll buy more chickens."

In Goz el Halag and 2,000 other villages, local development committees have been organized, comprised of members elected from the communities themselves. The committees hold meetings to discuss their needs and priorities. Once a development plan is drawn up, interested individuals or groups apply for credit. The committee screens applications and monitors the use and repayment of loans.

The majority of the projects involve food security, including irrigated farming and livestock raising, followed by environmental conservation and the development of small enterprises. Many villages now have primary health care clinics and pharmacies and all have access to clean water.

Each community has a women's group, sometimes several, through which women are offered training in areas such as bookkeeping, cheese-

making and leather production. In the process, the women also acquire a new set of ideas about themselves, and about the kind of lives they lead. Such awareness is a precondition to any kind of action that might breach the rigid codes governing family and community life in Sudan, which are moulded by Islamic tradition.

Lower Atbara was considered one of the most difficult areas in terms of in-

They sit in meetings with men and speak out. They participate in planning new activities, in marketing, in training programmes, all of which would have been unheard of four years ago.

Islam's neighbour, Fatima Moustafa, lives in a two-room house that she shares with her husband and eight children. She sits at her sewing machine in a room that is completely bare except for a bed made of wood and string and a

glass-fronted sideboard containing a few glasses and a neat row of shiny tin pots.

"I learned how to use the machine at dressmaking classes with the women's group. I bought it two years ago with a loan of 24,000 pounds (\$50) from the *sandouq*, which I paid off in a year. I make clothes for my children and for my neighbours' children and I sometimes sell them on the market. I have money for what I need now, and my husband lets me decide what to buy. He is very happy because we can now afford to eat better."

The level of women's participation varies in the five areas in which the ADS programme is at work. North Kordofan, located

600 kilometres south of Lower Atbara, is less of a male dominated culture, according to Mohamed Abdel Raouf, whose association with the ADS programme goes back to 1986, when he helped assess the needs of various regions for the Government of Sudan and UNDP.

"Women have always played a huge role in the economy of the region," explains Raouf. "They have a 75 per cent or more input in agriculture and therefore men are accustomed to their participation. We don't force women into the training courses, it's the men who submit their names. The extra money they earn means that people eat better and their health improves."



A farmer in Lower Atbara harvests sorghum. Seeds for the crop were bought on credit through the ADS programme.

volving women. But project staff—who are almost entirely Sudanese nationals—say they have seen a complete turnaround in attitudes. "When work started here four years ago, it was hard even for a female 'animator' [community organizer] to meet and talk to the women because the men simply didn't trust anyone," says Taghi Farver, who masterminded the ADS programme and has worked on and off as a consultant since it began. "Sometimes you might see a man hiding behind a door or pillar during women's meetings."

Today, through the patient efforts of Farver and other project personnel, the women here are active and articulate.

More than half of the 15,000 people who have received training so far in North Kordofan are women, according to Khouf. "When we started the sewing classes we had only 15 women and girls. Soon, husbands from every village brought their wives. Every father wanted to put his daughter in the programme. So we had to start a second one."

Though the way of life within each region is distinct, the success of the ADS programme stems from the fact that it is shaped by the wishes and constraints of communities themselves. In this uncompromising desert environment, people are resilient and have traditional ways of coping with hardship. Understandably, changes have been slow in coming, but are nevertheless taking root over time.

Abdel Majeed, who monitors and evaluates the ADS programme in Lower Atbara, sees changes every day. Majeed regularly attends meetings of village development committees like the one taking place in Alldabura, a village on the west bank of the Atbara River. Under a large acacia tree in the centre of the village a cluster of men in long, flowing white *jellabias* sit on one side of a courtyard, a group of women on the other. They outnumber the men by two to one. Some hold babies on their laps, constantly adjusting the filmy scarves around their heads to cover their hair.

Some members are unhappy about a cattle restocking project, which they feel benefits rich men, while poorer people get sheep and goats. A young woman speaks up. She says people are worried about the dwindling value of funds in the *sandug*. This is a big problem be-



A meeting of the village development committee in Alldabura.

cause Sudan's rampant inflation quickly erodes the value of money. The village committee understands the importance of conserving and increasing *sandug* funds, and field staff provide constant guidance to communities in their care. They are encouraged to use the money to buy seeds and tools and to expand existing projects to include more people. "Always have projects ready for investment," says Majeed. "We are here to study them with you and to help you refine them to make them workable."

As the meeting draws to a close, people depart through a labyrinth of alleys and yards where elders sit reading the Koran. They want to be home well before sunset to prepare themselves for prayers.

In family compounds throughout the village women pound millet while others sit in small groups with a sea of tin trays around them. They are making biscuits for *Ramadan* from millet and rice flour. Others make unleavened bread and cook stews on clay stoves that they have learned to make themselves through the ADS programme, and that consume less firewood than traditional ones.

When the sun goes down, everything stops for the evening prayer. Women pray separately from men. They wash their hands and feet and after that their faces. Then they place their prayer mats on the sand, facing east. At that moment it seems their lives are as rich as they could be under any circumstances. This richness has something to do with their close physical involvement with the vast landscape beyond the village walls, and with each other.

After prayers, the women serve *iftar*, the meal that breaks the fast, to the men. The men eat together — grandfather, father, adult sons and older boys — sitting in a circle on the ground. The children come in to replenish dishes or bring more lemonade. Conversation trails off. The women remove the plates and tea is brought in. They then eat their meal in the place where they have been cooking. Their work for the day is done. ■

Ruth Massey, who recently retired from UNDP, is a photojournalist based in New York City and Paris.



In 25 days silkworms mature into cocoons, from which silk is produced.

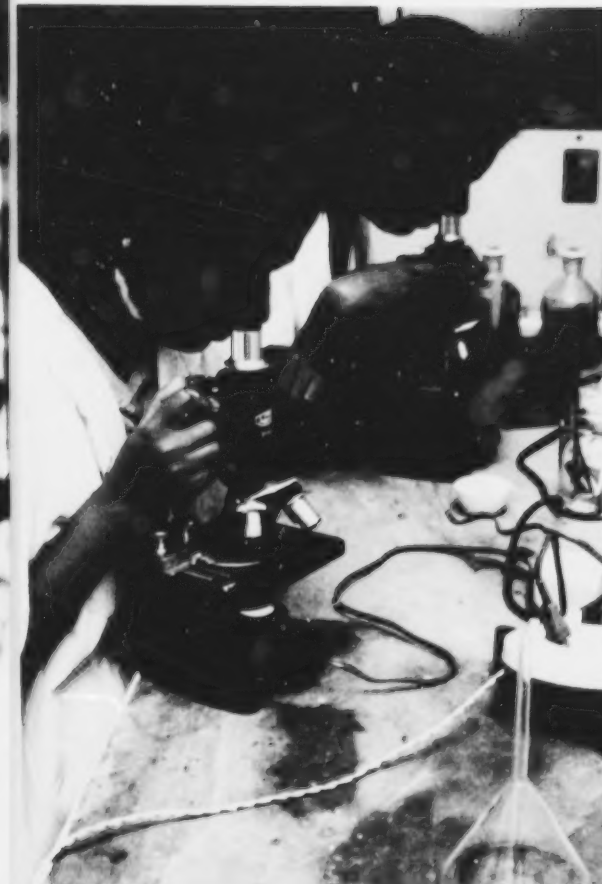
Sri Lanka: Spinning New Opportunities from Silk

For rural farming families, sericulture has meant an escape out of poverty and new options for women.

Text and photographs by David Beatty

Kandy — It is early morning on a small hill farm not far from the city. Madathi and her eight-year-old son, Mano, are gathering mulberry leaves from their one-third hectare plantation. Every day, before going to school, Mano helps his mother feed the silkworms they keep in the shed at the bottom of the terraced garden. Together they take the fresh leaves down to the rearing house and spread them over the feeding trays that are stacked along both sides of the room. Soon the air is filled with an audible crackling: the strange sound of thousands of tiny white caterpillars munching their way through the fresh leaves. This is the beginning of a 5,000-year-old process, the sound of silkworms that will be translated weeks later into the soft rustle of silk fabric in a store in the capital, Colombo.

Some years ago this was not a task that Madathi could have imagined



Left: Staff at a pathology laboratory in Nilambe monitor diseases affecting mulberry trees and silkworms.

Centre: Reeling silk thread at a factory in Pallekelle.

Bottom: Gathering mulberry leaves, which are used to feed silkworms.



herself performing, but the introduction of sericulture has brought a welcome change to her family's life. Her husband Muttusamy, formerly a labourer on a government livestock farm, had been unsure of its viability when the idea had first been proposed by the government's Silk and Allied Products Development Authority, or SAPDA. But sericulture is catching on as more farmers are discovering that it is both profitable and ecologically beneficial. It helps the smallholder escape the poverty that is often the lot of those living off marginal land. And it also brings new opportunities to village women, who make up 80 per cent of the sericulture workforce.

The main benefits of sericulture for women may be economic in a country that already has a good record on education, female literacy, family planning and health care. But it is also bringing women together and strengthening their position in marginal communities that have lagged behind the rest of the country.

"Rearing silkworms has made our lives easier and brings us a better income than we thought possible before," says Madathi. She explains that on the farms it is women who are in charge of feeding and rearing the silkworms, while their husbands take care of the heavier manual labour. A box of 20,000 seed worms, enough for one rearing, costs about 250 rupees (US\$5). The worms take 25 days to mature into cocoons. Madathi grades the cocoons, sorts them into piles and bags them for collection. Then they are taken to SAPDA's reeling factory at

Pallekelle, near Kandy, where they are processed into silk yarn. Madathi's worms produce an average of 25 kilos of cocoons each month, which yields an income of between 3,000 and 4,000 rupees (\$60-\$80) – more than double a typical monthly wage.

For Madathi the rearing of silkworms requires meticulous attention – they have to be fed every five hours and carefully watched for any signs of disease. But she admits that the work is much less physically demanding than other kinds of farm labour. Her routine day consists of feeding her livestock – two goats and two cows, which provide milk as well as manure for compost to ensure a healthy mulberry crop – pruning the trees regularly, and tending the vegetable and leguminous crops that are grown among the mulberry trees and provide a portion of her family's daily nutrition.

Sericulture was first introduced in Sri Lanka more than two decades ago with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO). There is no known indigenous tradition of sericulture in the country. Yet the climate is favourable: mulberry leaves can be grown year round, providing an uninterrupted supply of silk cocoons. Moreover, the mulberry has proved to be key in developing a sustainable system of agriculture on Sri Lanka's steep hillsides: Its deep root system holds soil in place and taps low underground water supplies, allowing soil to retain moisture. By inter-cropping mulberry with various leguminous crops on carefully terraced slopes, production can be maintained with far less loss of topsoil.

The silk industry, which is still small in Sri Lanka compared with the production of tea, rubber or coconut, dates back to 1972 when 120 hectares of mulberry were started on a state-owned plantation, and research and training began through the establishment of SAPDA. In the 1980s, with further as-



The Bombyx Mori weaving centre, where Nanavathil was trained and now works.

sistance from UNDP and FAO, the managerial and technical capacities of SAPDA were improved, and the quality of the silk was upgraded by improving silkworm hybrids and increasing the efficiency of the silk processing plant at Pallekelle. Today, in addition to the processing plant, which employs 80 women, SAPDA runs a hand-loom weaving centre, three nucleus farms for rearing seed worms, and a research centre for egg production and distribution.

It is only in the last four years that the fledgling industry has been given impetus with the leasing of state-land to smallholders as part of a government scheme aimed at alleviating poverty and creating employment opportunities for women. There are currently more than 1,200 hectares of mulberry under cultivation, benefiting some 3,000 families. SAPDA's strategy is now to take the industry to the next level by training small groups of leader-

ers in each area, each of whom will train 20 to 30 small farmers to cultivate mulberry and rear silkworms. The goal is to reach 2,000 hectares by 1995-96, at which time UNDP assistance is expected to end. At that level, says Sunil Sirisena, general manager of SAPDA, the industry would reach a "critical mass" — a threshold of maturity attractive to private investors — and have a good chance of becoming self-sustaining.

While the silk industry in Sri Lanka still has a long way to go before it can compete with the quality of silk produced in China or Thailand, it has considerable potential. "Sri Lanka is uniquely endowed for this type of small-scale agroindustry," says Frederick Abeyratne, an agricultural economist with UNDP. "Over 70 per cent of the population is still rural based, and mulberry cultivation is ideally suited to the small farmer with a few hectares." Moreover, sericulture does not require a huge investment in sophisticated machinery.

Profitability is one reason why mulberry is attracting a growing number of farmers. With less than half a hectare of mulberry a family can earn 35,000 rupees a year, compared with 26,000 for sugar cane, 20,000 for tea, and 10,000 for rubber.

And while the industry still receives state support, a number of private companies in the vicinity of Kandy are making use of the silk yarn produced by SAPDA. One of these, Bombyx Mori, was the inspiration of Cuban-born artist Nazha Sehawer. From her weaving centre in the lush green hills overlooking the Victoria reservoir she employs 150 women from nearby villages who produce a wide range of silk yarns, knitwear, tapestries, carpets and soft toys. In an area with few employment possibilities, the centre, which is now well established, has created a new source of income for women in the villages. It also offers them the choice of working at the centre or at home.

Nanavathi is a married woman in her

forties with two children. Bombyx Mori gave her three months' training, and she has been weaving silk for the company for the last four years. "I prefer to work here at the centre," she says, "as there are too many chores or distractions at home. And I like the company of other women." Provided the work is done on time, the women are free to come and go as they please. For Nanavathi, the alternative would have been working in a garment factory near Kandy, which would have meant further travel and fixed working hours. Here the money is often better and she likes the easy-going atmosphere, which she says is like that of a large family.

Many of the women — knitters, spinners as well as some of the weavers — now work at home out of preference, or because they have young children to look after. One girl, who produces silk knitwear, says she gave up her job in the factory when she got married because her husband wanted her to stay at home. Now that they have two children, the extra cash Siri earns from knitting at home is welcome. But it is not just the money that is important. "A woman also gains self-respect by having something to do other than housework," she adds.

One of the most promising ventures to have come out of the sericulture project is the Nuwara Eliya District Sericulturists' Cooperative Society near the small hill town of Hanguranketa. Here, a number of women from farming families already engaged in mulberry cultivation and silkworm rearing have formed a weaving cooperative with technical assistance from SAPDA and a loan from the Development Finance Corporation of Ceylon. Started only in March 1994, it is the first enterprise of its kind where women have become involved in both rearing worms and weaving fabric. At present there are 35 members, many of them in their early 20s with little education and few other employment prospects. The combined income from rearing silkworms

and weaving fabric can be as much as 7,000 rupees a month. Already the women are looking into how to finance their own transport, as some women have to walk four miles to reach the centre from their villages. Profits from the weaving are also being ploughed back into the cooperative, which, although barely a year old, has become a model for other parts of the country.

Says Nadini, one of the cooperative members: "We respect our menfolk, but we do not feel in any way subservient or inferior to them. Education and local television have also made us aware of the opportunities that exist and we are taking advantage of these to improve ourselves and our families. If sericulture helps us in this way, then it is a good thing." ■

David Beatty is a photojournalist based in the UK and Sri Lanka. His work has appeared in Geo, the Smithsonian Magazine and other publications.

The Petén — As welcome as a breeze, Vilma Rodriguez entered the wooden kitchen shed of a house in Guatemala's steamy northern Petén region. Outside, a hard gold sun beat down on the ancient settlement; only the old *ceiba* in the central plaza — the tree of life, umbilicus between heaven and earth for the Maya Indians who first settled here — seemed to give cool shade. Days have felt more cruelly hot than ever in recent years, townspeople say, and some wonder aloud whether it is because they are cutting down more and more of the surrounding forest, shelter and filter between them and the sun.

Inside the cooking hut however, a perspiring housewife named Maria Francisca Valle looked suddenly fresh with delight at the sight of Vilma.

"It's working beautifully! We're saving money!" she said.

They crossed the kitchen to caress an unlikely object of affection: a raised, wood-fed oven of clay bricks, topped with a dome round as a hive and white as powdered limestone. Rodriguez, who learned how to make the heat-conserving ovens with their stovepipe chimneys while away at school, brought the skill back to her small (pop: 4,000) home town of San Francisco. Pushing the idea among neighbours, she made converts for the stove she used in her own home. It saves the forest by saving wood, yet doesn't attempt to wrench women away from familiar ways of cooking central to family life.

Not yet out of her twenties, with just one child instead of the typical many, Vilma Rodriguez impressed me nevertheless as a sister to other wise women I have met in this rainforest region. They want to live modern lives in and around their tropical jungles without



Lacandon Indians in the rainforest of Chiapas.

Wise Women of the

"Where will I get the netful of food she asked for?" she said.

And then the guardians of food were called upon by her:

"Come thou, rise up, come thou, stand up:

***Generous Woman, Harvest Woman, Cacao Woman,
Cornmeal Woman,***

Thou guardian of the food of one Monkey, One Artisan..."

***And then she took hold of the silk, the bunch of silk at the top
of the ear of corn.***

***She pulled it straight out, she didn't pick the ear, and the ear
reproduced itself to make food for the net.***

It filled the big net.

— Popol Vuh (sacred book of the Mayas)

As healers, food providers, and keepers of the stories and secrets of generations, women hold special keys to ways of saving tropical forests.

destroying them. Only sometimes attached to government or non-governmental organizations (NGOs), their work seems to come out of a personal yearning toward both preservation and progress. They may be herbal healers, using rainforest products for medicine; they may be teachers of the old languages, important to preserve for the information they hold about the forest, its features and management; or they may try to breed forest creatures for food to stop their depredation in the wild. Or as Rodriguez does, they may promote the planting of high-protein, old Maya standbys like breadfruit, amaranth and *bledo*, a chard-like vegetable, to boost nutrition among the poor.

Like the maiden Blood Woman in the sacred Maya book, who was commanded by the crafty grandmother to a daunting task — fill a huge net with food in quick time from a small garden — these rainforest women attempt to produce life from the forest, without cutting it down. In their own ways, they “take hold of the silk” without destroying the corn, extracting what they need and more for others, leaving what is original to reproduce itself. Vilma Rodriguez does not describe what she does in those terms. She likes to say, with powerful simplicity, “It’s only sensible, isn’t it?”

Halting the destruction of the rainforest is one of the world’s most urgent challenges on the eve of the 21st century. These tropical stretches are the living lungs that cleanse the air we breathe in huge quantities. And the

jungles are wombs too, with their plant life hundreds of times more diverse than that found in temperate climes: from the tropical wombs have been born medicines we know well such as aspirin, quinine and birth control pills; in them may lie cures to the new diseases — like AIDS — which scourge us now; and they are likely to hold secrets to healing still-unknown conditions we will surely see erupt in years to come. There is argument of course, for saving the rainforests simply for what they are: home to our earth’s population of wonderful and fantastic animals, plants, insect and bird life, an interdependent world of its own that has developed over thousands of years. Once the jungle goes — and it is going at alarming rates, disappearing in fact in some countries — there is simply no way to reconstruct it, no way to bring it back.

Pressure on the rainforests feels overwhelming: precious hardwoods, oil, gold, animal parts and live exotic animals all attract trade, legal and illegal, which brings destructive traffic. Governments allow companies to raze rich jungle stretches to plant single export crops — bananas, for instance — which are important to earn foreign exchange. But greatest of all is the pressure that comes from ordinary, often poor farm families squeezed out of land elsewhere, who cut down the jungle a little more each season, pushing out their countries’ agricultural frontiers. Far from regulating or discouraging peasants’ spread into the rainforest, governments often turn a blind eye, or even encourage colonization, using the precious rainforest as a social and political

Cindy Karp / Black Star

Rainforest

By Mary Jo McConahay

safety valve to avoid facing deep problems of equitable land distribution and adequate assistance for family planning.

On the ground, of course, to the farmer's wife with many children to feed, the question of the day is not complex: she must support her husband in clearing any available land to plant, even if that means setting fire to the jungle. This reality is the reason why rainforest women with special skills or experience of a wider world — like Vilma — can be invaluable in saving the tropical jungles. They are part of the community, but also see the dangers to the wider society of eliminating the forest piecemeal. They are not strict conservationists, intent on preservation at all costs, but rather understand how sensible use of their jungle home need not destroy it. Vilma, for instance, knows the wood-saving stoves she promotes are a defense against deforestation, given that over 90 per cent of rural Central America and southern Mexico cooks with firewood. Yet she also knows their appeal to families rests with the money they save: the housewife Maria Francisca says where she once used 100 pieces of wood every three days, she uses just 30 now.

Arguably, women hold special keys to ways of saving the tropical jungles, given their inherited roles as healers, food providers, and keepers of the stories and secrets of generations during which the forest was used by its inhabitants without being fatally despoiled. I think of other women met in journeys around Gran Petén, that great green swath of tropical forest that stretches from western Belize, through northern Guatemala and into the southern Mexico state of Chiapas. Their home is the biggest single exten-



*Like the
Maiden Blood
Woman in the
sacred Maya book,
these rainforest women
attempt to produce
life from the forest,
without cutting it down.*

sion of Mesoamerican jungle. A thousand years ago, it supported a rainforest Maya civilization perhaps 10 times as big as the number of Indians and non-Indians who live here today — they were indigenous experts at extraction who understood that to destroy their forest was to destroy themselves. Just a decade ago, seen from space in satellite photos, the region looked like a verdant carpet; recent images show it more like a moth-eaten rug. Yet there remains much to save.

Nevertheless, the importance of the rainforest women's work doesn't seem to figure enough in the nascent public consciousness about rescuing what is left of our jungles. International environment programmes totalling tens of millions of dollars are unfolding in these contiguous Maya tropics right now for instance, but only a small percentage is directed toward projects

initiated by women or directed toward their needs. (Programme administrators say they cannot provide exact numbers, but estimates ranged between "about half of one per cent" to "under 10 per cent.") An acquaintance who reviews efforts for an international organization confides wryly: "Usually when I ask for numbers of women involved, project managers tell me to look under 'numbers trained.' How much 'training' do women need, anyway, and why isn't more spent on learning from them instead?"

Women are not yet favoured equally with men when opportunities for participation — and the cash that often comes with it — are being passed out by environment-minded organizations.

"Don't they realize we know every bird in this jungle by sight, or by their calls when they can't be seen?" complained two young women to me one afternoon on the banks of the Usumacinta River, a border between Guatemala and Mexico. Their male cousins had just been hired to register sightings by a private conservation group funded by international government money. The women, healthy and without children, were told nevertheless that job conditions might be too rough and inconvenient for them, entering the rainforest at all hours. But they suspected the real reason was this: that old prejudices which assumed women needed over-protection, and were less capable of technical tasks, also operated among the men from the developed country handing out the jobs.

"Don't they know we do that stuff as much as any of the men around here?" the young women asked indignantly.

On the other hand, some non-governmental conservation organizations seem slowly to be coming to

the realization that without women's participation, their efforts will come to nothing. Often that awareness quickly becomes a sense of urgency to get women involved.

"We've learned that consciousness of the problem has to dawn on both members of the couple: you're not gaining much if only the man comes to understand the ramifications of destroying the rainforest, then goes home to talk to his wife who hasn't been educated to the situation," said Claudia de Pastor, project assistant for a US\$10.5 million US Agency for International Development programme for the Maya Biosphere Region, one of several international donors to Petén conservation, which also include European and Asian governments.

In the early 1990s when government and non-governmental groups began attacking the problem of the shrinking Maya jungle — 60,000 hectares a year disappear — they endeavoured to gain the trust of communities on the forest edge by offering assistance in farming techniques, alternative crops and appropriate alternative employment to local men. "It's quite an effort to be accepted by the communities, and it's a process that begins with the men as heads of families," admitted de Pastor.

The newly-arrived organizations operate on the principle that without development and progress in their personal lives the farm families, men and women, are not likely to dwell on preserving the forest. Only when they can adopt ways to feed themselves besides slash-and-burn corn-farming methods, the understanding goes, and begin to see the jungle as a resource from which they can gather and earn only if it is intact, do they become grassroots conservationists themselves.



In fact, often the women themselves are way ahead of the international organizations. Several years ago Brenda Mallol, co-founder of a women's self-help group in the town of Nuevo San Jose in Guatemala's Petén, described her group's work to me this way: "Our object is to teach self-esteem, promote health, and help bring cash home so men don't have to knock down the forest to support the family. If the rainforest disappears, drought will come, and that will be the most terrible of things." At first the 30 or so women, including several widowed by recent political violence, taught each other dressmaking, and shared information about plants and kitchen gardens. Those who knew how to read and write taught others these basic skills. Recently the group, which calls itself Ixchel after the Maya goddess of corn and birth, received financing to raise tepesquintle, a prized, tasty jungle rodent high in pro-

tein which is in danger of extinction. It is this kind of effort, which arises from within the community out of needs women recognize as urgent for themselves, that is most likely to be successful in the battle against rainforest destruction.

"Women could participate more if they were given opportunities to develop their own ideas, but they don't know how to make proposals to international organizations, and they aren't offered help to learn how in the same way that men are," said Eric Cabrera, director of the Guatemalan Environment Conservation Trust, a partnership of five national environment-minded private groups in Guatemala City. "If NGOs were more aware of this there would be more important projects in effect by now that deeply involve women."

Those which do exist are seeds of hope: a non-governmental organization called Centro Maya is beginning to promote the wood-saving ovens Vilma Rodriguez demonstrated in San Francisco and 10 other small communities; another, Pro-Petén, employs women as teachers at the Eco-Escuela in the town of San Andres, a school on the forest's edge which teaches both ecology and Spanish to foreigners. In another Pro-Petén project some call "a model," women, youngsters and the elderly in another community gather, dry and pack allspice and other fragrant jungle products for an attractive potpourri export item, giving the entire community a stake in harvesting the rainforest, not permitting its destruction.

What is important to remember is that many women in these remote parts do not yearn to trade their rural habitats for urban landscapes, but love the sheer beauty of living close to



Jeffrey Fox

Paulina Mesh, mother of the "Garcia sisters," is one of a long line of traditional healers in San Antonio village in Belize.

the jungle. Many of course have no choice, because penury and landlessness have cast them out to civilization's edge to eke a living from soil wherever they may find it. But the rainforest is a magnet that holds many who might instead opt for life with the goods and distractions a city can bring.

In the village of San Antonio in western Belize, just three hours walk from the Guatemalan border, several sisters of the Garcia family carve stones in Maya Indian motifs, and utilize knowledge of natural medicines handed down from "granny healers" and other forebearers. Their home is near the Macal River that flows through forests and rich farmland, among fields of mounds and temple platforms that testify to the valley's importance to ancient Maya life. On the day I visit, Maria Garcia, 28, who "cures with herbs," appears content at a simple wooden table spread with leaves, dressed in the plain cotton *huipil* overblouse with black and white cross-stitching that might have looked familiar to her Yucatec Maya ancestors. It is a moment to remember that some 80 per cent of the world's population is dependent on traditional medicine and medicinal plants for daily use. Another

telling piece of data, from a report commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme: As 100 species a day become extinct, the loss of medicinal and potentially medicinal plants is significant, sometimes irretrievable. (With impact on industrialized countries too: a pharmaceutical industry analysis reckoned each such plant lost in the rainforests cost drug firms sales of more than \$200 million!) Garcia, like the women of Ixchel who raise animals in the same way as women painted on ancient Maya vases, is a link with the rainforest's past and any future it might have.

As we spoke, she glanced through a window at neighbours hurrying home before the heart of a storm, using palm leaves like umbrellas to keep off the rain. "We have everything here, you know, among us residents ourselves with special skills," Maria Garcia said. "A chiropractor, the midwife, herb doctors, the one who cures snakebite, our priests, our land, our art."

Three days by bus and boat from San Antonio, on the other side of Guatemala's Petén in the southernmost Mexican state of Chiapas, a woman named Nuk in a village called Lacanja

shares the experience of watching the rainforest around her disappear. Yet like many other women I have met in these parts, she is bent on making small changes in her life to preserve the best of her past and encourage a strong future for her children, without lamenting unduly the passing away of that which cannot be saved.

In some ways, Nuk's life is among those rooted most deeply in the jungle: 23 years ago when I visited her father, the respected Lacandon Maya chief named Ch'an Kin in his village of Naja, the journey was an arduous one, 10 hours on foot from the nearest road, and the family there lived not much differently than their ancestors might have lived a couple of centuries ago. The men wore their hair very long and loose, their only garment a white tunic that fell about the knees, and they trod barefoot through the thickest bush. I remember how the women dressed their pulled-back hair with carcasses of brightly-plumed birds, and can still see Nuk's mother Koh — one of three wives in Ch'an Kin's household — with a home-rolled cigar perennially in her mouth. Ceremonies honouring their gods were still performed — days-long vigils and prayer, and drinking of a special brew.

Today both Naja and Lacanja are reached by roads, which carry trucks laden with huge trunks of fine woods, or Mexican troops deployed around territory occupied by the Zapatista Indian insurgency. A forest hike of several hours to a hidden temple is still breathtaking, low cascades and the occasional jungle stream gleaming with water as clear as the sky; but Nuk's husband Kin Bor, who leads us, wears jeans and sneakers, and we hear no birds. There is electricity now in the village, and we spend an evening in front of the VCR, watching one of several documentaries to appear in recent years on the Lacandon Maya's evaporating way of life. It feels strange to me to watch Nuk and Kin Bor gaze at images of their own relatives planting and praying as if the scenes were from old history, instead of what they themselves lived just a generation ago. The children play, ignoring the screen.

"They are not too interested," says Nuk with a shrug, in the way of any mother talking about her kids' reaction to family movies they have seen too often, and to which they cannot relate. I sense a flash of regret in her eyes; however, it passes quickly. Nuk may still wear the typical Lacandon tunic and strings of coral beads for luck, but she also seems a woman standing very much in the present. She insists young Chan (Little) Nuk, 11, go to school, even though she is a girl. In the morning, she warms our coffee on a four-burner gas stove. "It's much cleaner," she says. Not for Nuk the eye infections and chronic respiratory ravages of women who spend a lifetime over the smoky cook-fires.

Indigenous knowledge has gone unnoticed by the institutional innovation system for so long not because it is informal or disorganized, as some would claim, but



*Women like Nuk are
ignored by government
and non-governmental
organizations at the peril
of losing the battle
to conserve the rainforests,
and the special
knowledge they hold.*

because it is cooperative and conducted within the pace of daily living. — Rural Advancement Foundation International, in a UNDP-commissioned study, 1994.

Months after the visit to Nuk's house, I find myself marvelling not at how "modern" Lacandon villagers have become, and certainly not despairing romantically that their lives have not remained in some putative "pure" state without the schools, goods and conveniences to which they obviously aspire. Instead, what comes to mind strongly is the image of Nuk as a kind of human information storehouse, a living memory bank of all that has come before in her corner of the world. Women like Nuk are ignored by government and non-governmental organizations at the peril of losing the battle to conserve the rainforests, and the special knowledge they hold. I recall that hanging above Nuk's head

was *episote*, an herb used in cooking not just for its flavour, but also for properties against children's gastrointestinal problems. Without consulting the calendar, she knew which of four kinds of beans, two kinds of yucca, endless species of squash, chillies, tomato and fruits are ripe for the table in the jungle *milpa*, and how to combine them for most nutrition. The medicinal herbs are not planted, she laughed when I asked, just gathered from where they are known to grow deep in the forest.

As I write this at home I look over at two clay figures Nuk crafted from white earth. One is male with a wide-eyed expression, dressed in miniature tunic made from the dry, shredded fiber of a plant "with fruit like a plum," the very kind of tunic she might have seen a great grandfather — certainly no one younger — wear, common among the Lacandon before they began to use cotton widely. The other figure is a person who might be male or female, mounted on a pale yellow jaguar with spots that leave black charcoal marks if I touch them with my finger. Nuk couldn't, or wouldn't, tell me why the animal has a head at either end, looking backward and forward at once. ■

Mary Jo McConahay is Central America editor for the Pacific News Service. She is currently writing a book based on her personal experience of issues facing the region's environment and its indigenous peoples.

The Women Water Masters of Haiti

By David Hecht

In a tense political climate and complex social structure, women leaders helped negotiate water rights and continue to find solutions to their community's basic needs.

Chantel — Met'dlo, or master-of-water, is known for dragging people down to their watery graves. Sometimes, though, the spirit will release them again. "One man came up after being under the water for several hours...with no scuba diving equipment," says Juliana George, who is a *manbo* (voodoo priestess) as well as a midwife and an *animatrice* (community leader) in Chantel, one of the many villages sprinkled across Haiti's impoverished Artibonite Valley.

Of all the voodoo gods in Haiti — Catholic saints blended with Africa's Yoruba and Fon spirits and Congo cosmology — Met'dlo was praised most when potable water flowed into Chantel recently for the first time. The Protestants of the village say they only praise the grace of God Almighty. But the peasants, of all religious persuasions, worked together to dig the trenches and lay the pipes from a natural spring over a mile away.

"Now we no longer have to walk for hours every day with buckets of water on our head," says Mrs. George, standing with other women leaders near the shiny new water fountain at the intersection of three dirt roads, which forms the hub of her village. "We women are the ones that do the cooking, the washing and the cleaning," she adds, "and having water close-by is a big help." With the extra



Haitian painter Eduard Duval-Carrie's depiction of the androgynous water spirit, Met'dlo.

time for farming, yields of Congo peas, bananas and sweet potatoes have noticeably increased.

The new fountain is just one small part of a water rehabilitation programme for the valley designed and executed by the development wing of the Albert Schweitzer Missionary Hospital. The project was funded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and undertaken in the tumultuous period after the ousting of President Aristide by the military in 1991. UNDP was able to support the project despite a United Nations embargo because it fell under "humanitarian" rather than "development" assistance, and because it was implemented by various non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

But water may never have flowed to Chantel if it were not for local women leaders. The project was designed to rehabilitate existing water lines, which Chantel never had to begin with. However, the women convinced the Schweitzer mission that it should also extend a new line to them, since in neighbouring villages the work included rebuilding lines from scratch. "It was only fair," says Mona

Charles, one of Mrs. George's fellow animatrices. "And we were prepared to do whatever it took to get it done."

What was needed was manual labour, for which the mission was unable to pay. The women organized work details and ensured that everyone in their village did their share. They also carried out the delicate task of forging a consensus on issues such as where the fountain was to be located. Eric Cole, director of the water division at the mission, says his colleagues were amazed when the work was finished ahead of schedule. "From sun-up to sundown, they were all out there," he says.

It did not happen easily. Extensive negotiation and compromise among various groups had to occur first. "The *lakous* [basic social units comprised largely of extended families] like to argue about things," says Mrs. Charles. The women not only had to deal with this internal friction, they had to take care not to infringe on the authority of local leaders, particularly the *chefs de sections* (local district officers).

The animatrice programme began in 1991, when a nutrition project for infants was started. The mission asked villagers to elect women from the community who they thought could best track the health of the children. The women were trained to study market prices and recommend to the village the best foodstuffs to buy in relation to nutritional value. Since then their roles have expanded. The animatrices collect data on disease in their villages, register births and deaths, and recently took part in a literacy programme.

According to the mission, overall health and nutrition levels for the 185,000 people in the valley have stabilized or even improved in some areas, despite the

Courtesy of Galeriez Fine Arts, Miami

increased stresses of political violence and the UN embargo. However, for Cole, their importance is as liaisons. "The women know what the problems are in their villages and they know how to explain them to all sides," he says.

Quite frequently, what the problems boil down to is water. Chantel animatrice Sonia Dieutel tells how the incidence of water-borne maladies such as typhoid, and diarrhoeal diseases caused by giardia and other parasites, have increased in her area. "When we were children the water was safer and we rarely had these sicknesses. Now, they kill us far more frequently than the dreaded *attachés* ever did."

The idea of the animatrice programme, explains Henri Menager, the Haitian-born director of community health and development at the Albert Schweitzer Hospital, is to reinforce traditional knowledge and social structures that were being lost under the strain of increased violence and poverty. "The animatrices help coordinate the lakous, where women have always been the driving force," he says.

A Haitian proverb defines the lakou simply as everyone who eats from the same pot. Yet, despite the openness this would suggest, lakous tend to be exclusionary and insular. They have had to become tightly bound to survive their impoverishment and to protect themselves against violent and often predatory external forces. At times they perpetuate the very problems they are trying to overcome. Cooperation, even between neighbouring lakous, has often been elusive and there are frequent disputes.

Each animatrice oversees three or four lakous and tries to strengthen cooperation among them. In the village of Tiroche, for example, a short walk from Chantel down a dirt road, the women played a key role in negotiating a solution to a local water dispute. By the time water was getting to Tiroche's public fountain there was hardly a trickle. It was being siphoned off by the lakous situated en-route from the spring, and the women and children from the lakous below had to go up the hill every

day to beg for what was rightfully theirs.

But when the animatrices came to the mission to ask for help, Cole says he had to tell them to work out their disagreements among themselves. So the women went back to their village and held meetings with everyone concerned. Eventually an agreement was reached to cut the private lines. "None of us from the mission even attended these meetings," says Cole. "All the mission did was come in with the technical assistance to cut and stop the pipes. Injustices are common and we are tempted to try to impose solutions that are fair. Yet when we do, I have found the solutions tend not to be sustained."

Even basic maintenance of water systems is frequently a problem. Peasants may say they do not want to interfere with the wishes of Met'dlo (who often takes the form of a frog or crab inside a tank). But the problem may be more that when communities do *tête ensemble* (put their heads together), they are seen as a threat to larger landowners, local authorities, or some other group with guns.

In this tense political climate, blood, it is said, flows easier than water. When Claude Duvalier became president in the 1950s he systematically co-opted the chefs de sections and other local leaders into an oppressive state regime. Under more recent oppression, peasants' distrust of authority has increased. Even voodoo priests, traditionally an alternative form of leadership in Haiti, are often accused of spying for government officials, the military or the *attachés*. Distrust also extends to missionaries and development workers, though inhabitants of the Artibonite Valley mostly say they appreciate the goodwill of the Albert Schweitzer mission.

Juan Salazar, a UNDP officer in charge of the programme in Haiti, says that providing assistance under Haiti's successive governments has certainly had its problems, but that there is also "a downside" to funding NGOs. "We have had to be very careful with whom we deal," he says, explaining that such

groups have occasionally been fronts for various political or other factions. But he adds that Haiti has an extraordinarily large number of NGOs, and that, "overall, they are a key development resource."

With the return of President Aristide and a legitimate government, the policy of UNDP and the Haitian government is to "diversify cooperation." Says Salazar: "Our idea is to involve more and more actors — local governments and local leaders, the private sector, NGOs — in general, all of civil society."

Before this latest project, the Albert Schweitzer mission had never received any multilateral funding. The amount from UNDP totalled only US\$34,000, but this was enough to rehabilitate two gravity spring systems, extend new lines to several villages and rehabilitate over 75 of the wells in the 1,500 sq. km. valley. Now a further \$200,000 has been requested for a project that will include building reservoirs at the natural springs of Coquillot and Deslandes as well as several irrigation systems.

And while the overall situation in Haiti remains difficult, Haitians have learned to cope with all sorts of adversities, as well as retaining a strong sense of themselves. Despite the best efforts of missionaries, for example, voodoo continues to flourish.

"Met'dlo is usually consulted before, during and after any development activity involving water," says Cole. "Strange bottles and other objects turn up in the tanks and sometimes obstruct the flow of water." One upcoming project is very near a shrine of an important *bocar* (voodoo priest). "Something will surely slow us down," Cole adds. "But in the end, the job will get done." ■

David Hecht writes regularly for *Africa Recovery*. He is co-author, with Malika Simone, of *Invisible Governance: The Art of African Micropolitics*, (New York: Autonomedia, 1994).



Peter Turnley / Newsweek / Black Star

FOR PALESTINIAN WOMEN, THE STRUGGLE GOES ON

Palestinian women played a key role in the long fight for national liberation. But now that self-rule is in reach, women fear they may be losing ground in the battle for equal rights.

By Elizabeth Coleman

Ramallah, Occupied Palestinian Territories — In this sun-soaked town built on a hill north of Jerusalem, the streets are jammed with long Mercedes taxis doing a brisk business ferrying passengers. Women — some wearing embroidered Palestinian dresses — crowd the sidewalks, making their way among vendors selling vegetables, spices and sweets made of pistachio and honey.

Now commonplace, such a scene was unthinkable five years ago during the *intifada*, or uprising against Israeli military occupation. Then, women took to the streets not to shop but to protest detentions of family members or to prevent soldiers from arresting Palestinian youths. When shops and markets shut down, women organized food cooperatives and grew vegetables, creat-

ing a virtual shadow economy. When the Israeli authorities closed the schools, women taught children in ad hoc classrooms. Women's committees provided medical treatment for the sick and injured and helped support the families of prisoners.

"The men counted on us like a reserve army," says Amal Kreisheh, a leading feminist and political activist with the Working Women's Society. But by the time the Israeli government and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) signed a peace accord in September 1993, Kreisheh began to realize that women's role in the *intifada* did not automatically guarantee them a lasting role in public life. Like auxiliary troops, the women were expected to disband and return home. Says Kreisheh: "We discovered that we had been used."

Indeed, aspirations of a democratic society in which women share fully in civic and political life quickly collided with the long-standing reality of male domination. Nowhere was this attitude more evident than when technical committees were appointed by PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat in late 1990 to support the negotiations that led up to the peace agreement. More than 90 per cent of the committee members were men.

Discrimination figures prominently in the lives of many Palestinian women. As in other parts of the developing world, traditions of rigid gender roles and early marriage often prevent women from completing a formal education and developing skills to earn a livelihood. Rising economic hardships and religious conservatism reinforces these constraints.

If inequities are not addressed early in the transition process, many Palestinian women say, they will become ingrained in the new governing institutions. A recent report echoes this sense of urgency. Published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), it states that Palestinian leadership is at a crossroads: "It can either seize the opportunity to build a nation based on equal and full partnership or risk losing women's hard-won accomplishments."

Despite the complexity of the current situation, women from all political and religious persuasions are working together to steer Palestinian society in the direction of gender equality. This movement, which began taking root before the intifada, seeks to broaden women's access to education and economic opportunities, secure their legal rights, and improve their health and welfare. Since 1986 UNDP has supported these aims through financial and technical assistance to Palestinian women's organizations, research centres and universities.

The work of these organizations is taking on greater significance as the Palestinian Authority begins to assume responsibility for governing the territories, starting with the provision of social services throughout the West Bank and Gaza. If women have a hand in shaping the policies that will direct this transition, Kreisheh and other activists say, they can ensure that programmes address their needs and that resources are equitably distributed.

But much to their disappointment, only one woman — Intisar Alwazir, the widow of a martyred PLO leader — gained a

seat in the president's Cabinet. And none were named to senior positions at PECJAR, the council that coordinates reconstruction and economic development. "When I saw the names of the appointees," says Suha Hindiyeih, who directs the Jerusalem-based Women's Studies Centre, "I was demoralized."

Palestinian officials attributed the imbalance to a shortage of qualified female candidates. Hindiyeih believes the pool of talent is much deeper. Last year, together with her colleagues at the centre and with funding from UNDP, she compiled a directory of professional women who might be suited for policy-making. The directory lists nearly 2,500 women in fields including health, education, law and engineering.

Through such efforts, women soon began to turn the scales. Zahira Kamal, one of two women who helped negotiate the peace process with Israel and an adviser to UNDP on gender in development, was a leading force in creating a technical committee on women's affairs. Its members, drawn from political groups and women's organizations, effectively doubled the proportion of women who now hold positions in government ministries. With support from UNDP and the Norwegian government, the committee is organizing training in management and leadership

skills for women in the emerging government, from a gender perspective.

With more seats at the table, women are now better poised to shape policy. Yet much work lies ahead. The social welfare provisions of the draft national development plan, for example, provide social security benefits only to salaried workers in the formal sector, excluding the many women who are housewives, farm workers or street vendors.

The omission is indicative of the fact that most policy-makers are blind to the "invisible" economic contributions of women, says Hindiyeih. Pausing to reflect, she admits that she herself was once guilty of this too.

It was 12 years ago, and Hindiyeih had just set out to interview farmers for a research project. Striding onto a field not far from the southern town of Hebron, she came across a woman and asked her where she could find a farmer to interview.

"The woman held out her calloused palms and said, 'Look at these hands.'" Hindiyeih, embarrassed, recognized her mistake at once, and never forgot the lesson. "She was right," she says. "Women are the backbone of Palestinian agriculture."

In time Hindiyeih became a leading researcher on Palestinian women. Since founding the Women's Studies Centre five years ago, she has also helped to nurture a new generation of researchers trained in gender analysis. Still, a paucity of data on women's status and needs stands in the way of gender-sensitive policies.

To help fill this gap, researchers from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics are teaming up



As in many parts of the world, women in the Occupied Palestinian Territories are the backbone of agriculture.

with the Ministry of Planning and UNDP to produce a national report on human development for the Palestinian Territories. Data will be collected and disaggregated by gender, and will help to quantify women's work, including home-based activities that are not factored into national income accounts.

Underlying progress in many areas of women's lives is the issue of legal rights. In late 1993, Palestinian officials released a draft Constitution, called the Basic Law. But unlike the 1988 Palestinian Declaration of Independence, the document offered women no assurance of equality. To many women activists, the oversight was a clear sign that the clock was being turned back.

The release of the Basic Law marked a turning point for the women's movement, say Kreisheh and other activists. Palestinian women realized that, in order to advance the rights of all women, they would need to set aside their considerable political differences and work together. They decided to lay out their demands in the form of a bill of rights.

The Women's Charter, which was released in August 1994, calls for explicit guarantees of women's rights and equality in the Constitution and legislation of the future Palestinian state. Although the Palestinian Authority has not formally responded to the declaration, activists have gathered thousands of signatures to demonstrate its widespread appeal.

The women's movement reached another milestone a month later, when hundreds of women across the political spectrum attended a conference on women and the law sponsored by Al Haq, a human rights organization based in Ramallah.

The conference built upon a series of workshops on women and the law sponsored by the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC). With support from UNDP and the Dutch government, the centre has analyzed existing laws and found widespread discrimination against women. For example, civil service laws let managers fire a woman who marries or becomes pregnant. Labour laws exempt altogether the informal sector in which most women work — usually in agriculture and textiles — and fail to protect

Health, education, legal rights: Links in a chain

As a young doctor with the Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees (UPMRC), Salwa Najjab spent much of her time on the road. Several times a week, she left her home north of Jerusalem and drove the two-lane highways that cut through valleys of vineyards or wind around terraced hills dotted with olive trees. At villages along the way, she would stop to treat local residents whose access to doctors and hospitals was limited by Israeli restrictions on travel.

Many of Najjab's patients were women, and through them she soon realized that traditional medical services fell short of meeting women's actual needs. "Maternal and child care is not enough," she says.

Through the UPMRC, Najjab set up a women's health programme that offers a broad range of obstetrical and gynaecological services — from prenatal care to pap smears for early detection of cervical cancer — at 23 clinics in the West Bank and Gaza. She has also trained a network of health workers who, following in her footsteps, provide health education and care to women in villages throughout the region.

Although there are many hospitals and clinics in the West Bank and Gaza, few of them offer women comprehensive care. To encourage healthcare providers to adopt this broader ap-

proach, UNDP brought together a task force of female physicians and health professionals known as the Palestinian Coalition for Women's Health. Says Costanza Farina of UNDP's Jerusalem office: "It is a rare platform where the three key players — government, non-governmental organizations and UN agencies — can start thinking nationally."



Peter Stone / Black Star

According to Najjab, attention to women's health — reproductive and otherwise — is long overdue. "Women's health was not a top priority during the intifada," she says. "Women are taught to be selfless, and with so many others injured, the problems of their husband and sons took precedence."

The coalition, which is currently coordinated by Rita Giacaman, director of the Birzeit University's Community Health Department, is developing training manuals on treating women at various life stages, including menopause. Among other plans, it will also work with school officials to provide health education for girls. Moreover, its national policy proposals would make the health care system more attentive to social factors that influence women's health.

In order to lead a full and healthy life, a woman must have access to education and to legal rights, says Giacaman. "They are links in a chain." — E.C.

women whose employers pay them less than men who hold the same jobs. Criminal codes also impose a double standard. "If a woman kills a man because he committed adultery, she will go to jail or could even be executed," says WCLAC lawyer Hanan al-Bakri. "A man who kills for the same reason does not even face criminal charges."

The overlapping legal legacies that govern life in the territories further complicate matters. Indeed, to study law in the West Bank or Gaza is to study a history of repeated occupation. There are statutes still in effect that stem from the time of Ottoman rule, the British Mandate, Jordanian rule in the West Bank, Egyptian rule in Gaza and martial law imposed by Israel. And those are only the secular statutes. Separate religious courts administer laws set down centuries ago by Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Islamic officials.

Most religious laws, many of them codified more than 1,000 years ago, treat men and women differently. A Palestinian man can divorce his wife at will, for example, while a woman must prove grounds for a divorce in court. In the *sharia*, the set of Islamic laws that govern most Moslem countries — and the majority of Palestinian women — a woman's inheritance is limited to half a man's share. In the seventh century, when this particular law was inscribed in the Koran, allowing women to inherit at all was extremely progressive. But different standards apply today.

To eliminate discriminatory laws, some women have called for the establishment of a civil code that would regulate matters such as divorce, custody and inheritance. It is a move that Islamic groups, in particular, oppose. And because the Islamic courts became a symbol of autonomy during the intifada, WCLAC lawyer Hiyam Kakur explains, many Palestinians might perceive ef-



Expanding women's access to education and economic opportunities, along with securing their legal rights, are among the goals of the Palestinian women's movement.

orts to disband them as an affront to the national cause.

Given these facts, most women feel the only politically viable option is to press for a more liberal interpretation of Islamic law. Tunisian women have met some degree of success using this approach. By citing various passages from the Koran, Tunisian reformers have managed to eliminate polygamy and unilateral divorce by the husband. The WCLAC is drawing upon the experience of legal reformers in other countries under Islamic law, in search of new ways to deal with their own situation in the Palestinian Territories.

However, legal assurances of equality alone will not produce an equitable society for women, activists say. Social and cultural attitudes must also change.

High regard for modesty, which reaches beyond attire and behaviour, sharply curtails women's ability to participate in public life. Women's chastity is a matter of family honour, which imposes a virtual taboo on discussion of a subject like rape. Rarely is a victim of physical abuse or sexual assault willing to prosecute, for fear of being stigmatized or ruining her family's reputation. These attitudes have deepened in recent years with the rise in fundamentalism, finding resonance even among younger women.

In spite of social sanctions, some women are beginning to look for help.

Over the past six months since the WCLAC installed a domestic violence hotline, an average of 40 women have called per month. The centre provides callers with crisis counselling and legal representation, and directs them to medical care.

Several women at the law conference last fall gave testimony of abuse by husbands and family members. Says Al Haq's Randa Siniara, who organized the conference, "We need to talk about these issues more openly so women won't be afraid and in danger."

Amal Kreisheh agrees. She spends much of her time educating women workers in Ramallah's factories. She also uses the opportunity to talk to them about rape, sexual abuse and battering. Their response led her to form a support group for women who have experienced sexual harassment at work.

Though political and social change often come slower than Kreisheh would like, the Palestinian women's movement is gaining momentum. In time it could prove to be the catalyst in establishing an equitable and democratic society. Up and down the terraced hillsides that surround Ramallah, where Kreisheh works and lives, the almond trees are in full bloom, a tangible sign of new beginnings. ■

Elizabeth Coleman is a freelance writer based in New York.

A related UNDP report, "At the Crossroads: Challenges and Choices for Palestinian Women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip," is available in English through UNDP's Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People, One UN Plaza, New York, NY 10017, attention: Lina Hamadeh-Banerjee. An Arabic version is available through UNDP's office in Jerusalem: 2 Mujeer El Deen Street, PO Box 51359; Fax: (972-2) 810 768.

Women

AIDS

Epidemic

No Individual Solutions

Once considered at the periphery of the epidemic, women are becoming infected with HIV faster than any other population group — at a rate of 5,000 women a day. While prevention programmes have focused on education, distribution of condoms and other services, UNDP's Elizabeth Reid argues that attention must also be given to the social context surrounding sexual behaviour. By way of illustration we take you to a bar in rural Uganda and a discussion among friends. Similar conversations are no doubt occurring in other communities around the world:

Over a glass of beer, Stephan exclaimed that he wanted to marry. But, he lamented, none of the possible brides was going for less than five cows. His father had told him that times were hard and that he couldn't afford more than two cows. So his son must wait.

Bitterly, Stephan pointed to the Health Ministry's anti-AIDS poster above the refrigerator: "Love Carefully! Stick to One Partner!" "Why," he demanded, "is there no poster telling parents how to behave?" Since coming to power, President Museveni had repeatedly begged parents to bring down the bride price — without success, at least not around Bushenyi.

"Well," ventured a visitor to the village, "the notion of buying a wife is barbarous anyway and must change if women are to be equal."

"You don't understand," burst out Helen. "You think a woman feels bad if she's exchanged for cows or money. But if there's no exchange, she feels she's worth nothing. I cost my husband 10 cows. I had a good education from Irish nuns at Mbarara. I speak English and can run a business. My father spent money on me — on clothes and education — so why give me away for nothing? You want a healthy, educated bride, you pay for it."

Stephan raised his voice: "I only want my own woman, but my father can't afford it. I'm not crazy, I know all about AIDS.

With a wife I wouldn't live risky." He continued: "But why must men pay for a bride, just so that the woman feels better? A wife costs money, you have to keep her. Her family would have to keep her if she didn't marry. So why must I pay to get her?"

"That's bad thinking," retorted Helen "Women must feel valued or we can't look for equality. If my husband got me free, I couldn't start a revolution. A free bride's a slave — no worth, no status, no respect. Everyone knows my bride price was 10 cows. When I talk revolution they listen, with respect."

"So you see," Jill smiled softly at the visitor, "for us, women's liberation has to start from where we're at, not where you're at!"

And so the evening ended, but the problem remained unresolved. Stephan and the other men of Bushenyi are bitter and scared, and the women — as Helen had said the evening before — are forced to say no to risky husbands. But while the women too are scared of HIV, they don't want divorce. The threat of divorce could come not only from refusing sex but from not bearing more children.

In the face of such complexity, how relevant is an HIV prevention menu offering a choice of condoms, STD services, faithfulness or abstinence? To believe that such a menu could be relevant assumes that solutions to the HIV epidemic are ones that human beings are individually capable of adopting.

Women with HIV: 5 – 6 Million*



*Map shows estimated distribution of HIV-infected women alive as of late 1994

According to estimates of the World Health Organization (WHO), more than five million women worldwide are HIV-positive. By the year 2000, the number is expected to reach 14 million. Seventy per cent of the infected women are under the age of 25. Among older women, the HIV virus is most frequently transmitted through their husbands and the fathers of their children. WHO estimates that up to 90 per cent of women are infected in this way.

Why are infection rates among women and girls increasing in such large numbers? There is a physiological as well as a social basis to this trend. The genital tract of women, especially young women, allows

passage of the virus into the bloodstream relatively easily. This is especially the case when sexual intercourse is hurried, frequent or non-consensual or undertaken in the presence of genital infection, lesions, inflammation or scarification.

Perhaps more fundamental to the problem is the undervaluation of women in many societies, and the subordinate role they tend to assume in sexual decision-making. Disempowerment also extends into the arena of the law: whether by the absence of legislation or enforcement, women often lack legal recourse in areas such as rape, incest, age at marriage, divorce and custody, and protection from violence in the family.

But to focus on women exclusively and on the disadvantages they face is misleading. Women, like men, are essentially social actors: they live in the company of others, interacting sexually and socially, caring for and nurturing others. Overwhelmingly, it is women who are providing care for the sick. And in situations where they can exercise some control, women have often proved far more powerful and willing to act than men. In the case of the HIV epidemic, it is most often women who become agents of change: speaking out in churches, forming grassroots organizations, talking to their families, mobilizing friends. — E.R.

But in a cultural situation as multi-layered as the one above, there are few — if any — individual solutions. There are only social ones.

This is clearly the case for women, if only because there are no means of protection that women can use on their own. Women need the cooperation of their sexual partners if they are to adequately protect themselves from sexual transmission of HIV. Their partners must use condoms or agree to the women using them where female condoms are available and affordable. Anything that a woman can do by herself without her partner's knowledge — for example, using a diaphragm, spermicide or cervical cap, or trying to reduce the frequency of intercourse — offers her only slight protection.

In the case of men, an analysis based on the availability of technology, rather than human nature, would lead to the assertion that men can protect themselves if they so desire. It is just a matter of choice, some say: to use a condom or not. But the lives of people, their motives for action, their processes of decision-making, are far less straightforward than this. "Between the idea/And the reality/Between the motion/And the Act/Falls the Shadow," wrote T.S. Eliot, in his own admission of human frailty. For HIV, this shadow falls over the uncharted spaces between people: the territory of social and sexual relations.

How then can Jill's challenge be met? How can change begin from the point where people are: from Stephan's

demand for safety and Helen's demand for value? Other conversations may also be taking place among friends in bars, among families around town: conversations about the exploitation of children whose parents have died of AIDS; about the care of the ill, the shortage of food supplies because more and more producers are falling sick and growing slim; the demand that the sick be sent away. How can this community, and others, be helped to think through these issues, and find ways to survive?

Does Jill's rebuke imply that there is no role for outsiders – either in the struggle to give women value or to protect women and men from infection and its consequences? Not necessarily, although in some situations this may be true. Stephan, Helen and the others, however, are far from a solution. Yet a solution must emerge, and quickly, if the village is not to be engulfed by the horrors of the HIV epidemic.

Helen, like many women, has given a good deal of thought to the problem: she sees it as a question of survival. The evening before she had argued that for women there were no individual solutions. She had contended that women as a group had power that individual women lacked. Okay, she had elaborated, so we get together. A husband living risky comes home and sees more than just his scared wife, waiting to obey. He sees a *group* of women, all with the same problem, all saying the same thing! This is revolution, she surmises. It's bigger than our political revolution, it's men made to hear women.

Helen believes that the problem lies in the social and economic changes that have disrupted traditional roles and responsibilities, without replacing them with more modern ones. Our men, she maintains, have gone weak. Before they were important, but now there are no warriors, no hunters. They just lie around drinking. Hunting girls proves they're still men. You see how the revolution is, she continues, men have gone so weak they are scared of women in numbers. They can't say we're silly. Ankole has funerals every day – and Rakai District is worse.

Helen has realized that the epidemic is forcing women to make choices and to act on them. She echoes many women's thoughts when she states that now for women it's children first. Mothers want to live for their children. Risky husbands come second.

But she and Jill recognize how fragile this strategy is. Jill is scared. How long will it take for the revolution to spread, she wonders. How many Helens are there? Some women may be able to threaten, cajole or help men to change their behaviour. But men themselves will have to *want* to change. And even that will not be enough if it takes place only at the level of individuals. Stephan wants to change, but he cannot because his family cannot afford a wife for him. Even if good quality and affordable condoms were available, their use would be

only an interim solution. For Stephan and his wife undoubtedly will want children. Without children, there will be no ancestors, no future.

How can these issues, so emotionally, culturally, socially and economically charged, be sorted out so that people can begin to construct a worthwhile future? Jill's claim is that this can only be done by the people themselves, starting from their current situation. In saying this she has defined the role of the outsider, the development practitioner: to build the capacity of a community to come together and debate these issues in a constructive way – in a way that builds consensus and leads to changes *that the community itself* has identified. This is the essence of social capacity-building and, without it, no other form of investment – be it in voluntary testing and counselling services, or in condoms – will be sufficient or effective.

The challenge to health and development practitioners is profound. It cannot be business as usual if we are to make a dent in the almost unimaginable consequences of this epidemic. There are already countries where between 30 and 40 per cent of people aged 15 and over are infected.

Traditional professional concerns, disciplines, cultures, styles of interaction will all have to change. To build the capacity of groups and communities to find social solutions to social problems, the skills required of an outsider include listening, appreciation, facilitating, strategic questioning, finding resolution to conflicts and bearing secrets. The values that must be present are respect, acceptance of diversity, concern for the welfare of others, honesty and trust. The environment within which this social capacity-building takes place should be supportive of these processes, rather than destructive. It must encompass a positive ethical and legal milieu, good and stable governance, including an active civil society, redistributive as well as growth policies, national leadership and courage. It is this kind of environment that will link the bar in Bushenyi to the national and international level. But the direction of linkage has been reversed. It now starts with Helen, Stephan, Jill and the others, and moves outwards. ■

Elizabeth Reid is director of the HIV and Development Programme of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). She is also the editor of HIV and AIDS: The Global Inter-Connection, published for UNDP by Kumarian Press in 1995. An English version of the book is currently available in the US through book-sellers. Individuals from developing countries may obtain a copy by contacting the HIV and Development Programme, UNDP, One UN Plaza, New York, NY 10017; Fax: (212) 906-6336.

Let's *Not* Forget About THE MEN

By Nick Danforth

For more than two decades, the women's movement and international organizations have worked to remove attitudinal and other barriers that have prevented women from fully taking part in the decisions that affect their lives. The global results of these important efforts have usually been very positive for women and men both. But in their zeal to liberate and empower, advocates of some "women in development" programmes have reinforced gender discrimination by excluding men from their efforts. Solutions to problems relating to female poverty, unwanted pregnancy and domestic violence, for example, have focused on women exclusively, in the assumption that men are unaware, indifferent or unwilling to help.

Happily, the slogan of "women in development" is giving way to the broader concept of "gender in development." It is a perspective that takes into account the socially-defined roles of both women and men. Through the lens of gender, women are viewed not as a separate group needing special attention, but as members of societies, in which men and women are intrinsically bound. Instead of reinforcing discrimination against women, gender-sensitive planners have developed strategies in which women and men work together toward shared goals: in part separately and in part together — much as they function in daily life.

More and more women, as well as men, have come to support this view. We argue that men, at least a significant number of men in every community, are willing to support — rather than inhibit — women's empowerment. This idea was reflected in a recent statement published by the Commission on the Status of Women of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. Drafted by 18 international women's health advocacy groups, it noted that "Improving the status of women is not a woman's issue, it is a human issue. It is time, therefore, to call men to action in this area."

No one argues that gender differences should be ignored. Development planners recognize the urgency of looking at the distinct needs — and strengths — of women. Studies revealing gender gaps in health, education, training, workloads and earnings are necessary first steps in finding remedies.

We also know that many programmes that seek to bring women into the mainstream are most effective if, in the early



B. Press / Pigma Pictures

stages, they build on the strengths of women as a separate group. Once strong associations of women are formed, they appear to be able to include men without being dominated by them. In Bolivia, for example, mothers clubs promoting small enterprises proved so successful that men sought to participate in them under women's control. Peruvian men have enthusiastically supported 800 community kitchens run by 16,000 women in Lima.

Similarly, in India, the management of women's dairy cooperatives in Andhra Pradesh and Bihar was recognized as more effective and more honest than that of male-run cooperatives; in time, many male dairy farmers preferred to sell milk to women than to their male counterparts. The explosive proliferation of grassroots women's organizations in rural Brazil, Kenya and Bangladesh is well known.

In countless development programmes women have successfully taken the lead and men have found it in their interest to follow. More often than not, the results of women's educational and economic empowerment, whether they be improved health and nutrition or higher incomes, benefit families and the community as a whole.

In one area that profoundly affects couples and families — reproductive health, including family planning — the exclusion of men has been blatant.

Contrary to what we have been led to believe, men's concerns for their sexual health and that of their partners have been underestimated, and men's selfishness is often exaggerated. Most men are very interested in family planning and in preventing sexually-transmitted diseases (STDs). Most men are also concerned about ensuring safe motherhood for their wives and the survival and well-being of their children.

Yet providers, usually women, of the basic components of primary health care in developing countries — safe motherhood, child survival and family planning — make practically no effort to involve men in these services.

The recent International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo helped draw attention to the widespread lack of reproductive health services for men. And in recent years, experimental programmes in both developed and developing countries have illustrated the advantages — indeed, the urgent necessity — of providing access to men.

Two very different programmes, one in Mexico and one in New York, come to mind.

Initially established in 1978 to assist young women, Mexico's *Centro de Orientación para Adolescentes* (CORA) is a small non-governmental organization founded primarily to prevent teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease. Its goals were to improve the confidence and self-image of young women and to give them the information and means to prevent unwanted sex, unplanned pregnancy and disease. As the programme became increasingly well-known, young men also became interested.

"Everybody talks about women's empowerment," says CORA's founder, Anameli Monroy. "But how can we em-

power men? Partners might be interested in learning more about reproductive health, but were not comfortable in what appeared to be a clinic run by women for women.

A Young Men's Clinic was created to meet that need. Staffed mostly by male doctors, it provides free physical exams needed for sports or jobs, treatment for STDs, counseling and condom instruction to young inner city men, mostly Hispanic and African-American. Many of those men have no alternative source of confidential reproductive and sexual health care. "Men are more likely to get involved," says the clinic's founder, Bruce Armstrong, "if programmes and providers tailor their services to meet some of the men's important needs — for support and respect, for sports and

"Everybody talks about women's empowerment. But how can we empower women if we don't empower men too?"

power women if we don't empower men too?" Just as women need to be more aware of their potential, responsibilities and choices as women, Monroy found it was equally important to help men in the same way. Men also need coping skills "to adjust to new male roles, both in society and within the human couple," she told a largely female audience at the Cairo conference.

The CORA strategy works. In contrast to its early days as a mostly female programme, CORA clients are now 70 per cent male. The organization has distributed nearly a million condoms annually. And it has even been asked to assist the Mexican government in involving young people in government programmes nationwide.

Balanced gender awareness is important in all reproductive health programmes, and in all cultures. As CORA was discovering the importance of male and female involvement in reproductive health in Mexico City, health planners had a similar experience at Columbia-Presbyterian Hospital in New York City. A Young Adults Clinic was organized there to address the growing problems of unintended pregnancy and transmission of HIV and other sexually-transmitted diseases among teenagers in the underserved inner city. Initially, although men were not excluded, mostly young women came to the clinic, which was held in the obstetrics-gynaecology unit, staffed mainly by female nurses and doctors. Clinic staff assumed that men were unconcerned about pregnancy, because men don't get pregnant, or about STDs, because men don't like condoms.

In time the young women clients began to express concern that their boyfriends were unaware of important facts about male and female anatomy, of the importance of condoms and other contraceptives and safe sexual behaviour. They felt their

recreation, for reliable information about sexuality...without embarrassment."

These young men want help, sometimes desperately. The Young Men's Clinic has become so popular it has outgrown its original space and small staff. Peer counseling has become a mainstay, as in CORA, essential not only for effective communication "man to man," but also as a low-cost solution to a chronically inadequate budget.

The benefits of building gender alliances can be found in the workplace too. Progress in economics, no less than in health, has far more to do with cooperation than with competition. Progress for women in the labour force is more likely when women and men learn to work as partners, not adversaries.

As the Commission on the Status of Women points out, "growing numbers of non-governmental organizations are mobilizing women and men to create genuine partnerships for action" to work together to promote gender communication, gender equality and equity, and research. Participants in the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing can look to the Cairo conference for ample evidence that in such fields as agricultural and vocational training — or in the obvious domain of reproductive and sexual health — the importance of gender partnership is being more fully appreciated. The often overlooked lesson from Cairo is that in solving problems in which both women and men are inextricably and intimately involved, they must work together as well as separately. ■

For 25 years Nick Danforth has designed international education programmes to involve men in family health and family planning.

Can inequality between the sexes be measured?

The Human Development Report 1995

says yes...and does it.

Since 1990, the *Human Development Report* has broken new ground as a major source of new development thinking and advocacy for change. This year is no different. The 1995 report shows that in many countries women are closing the gap with men in education and health. But it also reveals that women are all but excluded from economic and political decision-making.

Highlights:

- A new study on work, showing that if women's paid and unpaid labour were properly valued, women would emerge as the major breadwinners in most societies.
- An index ranking 130 countries on gender equality in basic health, education and income, showing that in no country do women fare as well as men.
- A new index ranking 116 countries on economic and political empowerment, showing that in the sharing of opportunities between women and men, there is still a long distance to go, in countries rich and poor.



"Nations that sit back and ignore the disparities between men and women in their societies do so at their own risk."

Mahbub ul Haq,
principal author of the Human Development Report

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 1995

Commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme
Published by Oxford University Press

See back page for ordering information.

To order the **1995 Human Development Report** in English, contact Oxford University Press at these and other locations worldwide. The price is US\$18.95 for the paperback version (ISBN 0-19-510023-9) and US\$29.95 clothbound (ISBN 0-19-510022-0).

Canada:

70 Wynford Drive, Don Mills
Toronto, Ontario M3C 1J9
Tel: (416) 441 2941 Fax: (416) 441 0345

Europe, Middle East & North Africa:

Walton Street
Oxford OX2 6DP
United Kingdom
Tel: (865) 56767 Fax: (865) 54416

USA:

2001 Evans Road
Cary, North Carolina 27513
Tel: (800) 451 7556
Telex: (919) 677 9654 Fax: (919) 677 1303

Other language versions of the report may be purchased from the following publishers. Prices may vary.

Arabic:

Arab World Printing House
25, Daher Street
Cairo, Egypt
Tel: (20-2) 906 708 Fax: (20-2) 591 8160

Chinese:

Institute of Policy and Management
Chinese Academy of Science
Attn: Prof. Ni wen-yuan
PO Box 8712, Beijing 100080
People's Republic of China
Tel: (86-10) 254 2617 Fax: (86-10) 254 2619

French:

Editions Economica
49 rue Hericart
75015 Paris, France
Tel: (33-1) 4578 1292 Fax: (33-1) 4575 0567

German:

UNO-Verlag GmbH
Dag-Hammarskjöld-Haus
Poppelsdorfer Allee 55
D-53115 Bonn, Germany
Tel: (49-228) 21 36 46 Fax: (49-228) 21 74 92

Italian:

Rosenberg & Sellier
Editori in Torino, Via Andrea Doria 14
10123 Torino, Italy
Tel: (39-11) 812 7820 Fax: (39-11) 812 7744

Japanese:

Kokusaikyoryokushuppankai
Keizaikyoryoku Building
42 Ichigaya Honmura-cho, Shinjuku-ku
Tokyo 162, Japan
Tel: (81-03) 3354 8571 Fax: (81-03) 3354 8570

Norwegian:

Universetets Forlaget
Kolstadgt. 1, Tøyen
0608 Oslo, Norway
Tel: (47-22) 20 91 70 Fax: (47-22) 57 53 53

Portuguese:

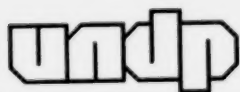
Tricontinental Editora, Lda
Calçada do Combó, 10-1/2
1200 Lisboa, Portugal
Tel: (351-1) 342 0650 Fax: (351-1) 342 0751

Russian:

Forssan Kirjapaino Oy
Box 38, Esko Aaltosen katu 2
FIN-30100 Forssa, Finland
Tel: (358-16) 4155 703 Fax: (358-16) 4155 737

Spanish:

Harla SA de CV
Antonio Caso No. 142, Col. San Rafael
06470 Mexico, D.F., Mexico
Tel: (52-5) 592 4277 Fax: (52-5) 705 3738



**United Nations
Development Programme**

One United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017

Division of Public Affairs
DCI-1900



08INSUSA009

FIRST CLASS

